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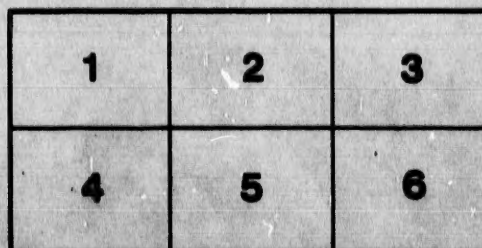
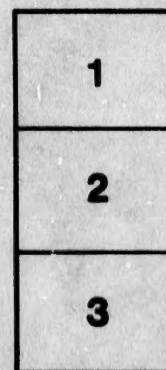
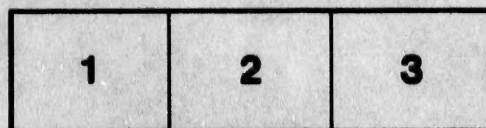
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THE CHRISTIAN PASTOR'S DESIRE.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, GOULD STREET, TORONTO,

ON MAY 30TH, 1875,

BY

REV. JOHN M. KING, M.A.

TORONTO:

GLOBE PRINTING COMPANY, 26 & 28 KING STREET EAST.

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TO

The Session and Congregation

OF

GOULD STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, TORONTO,

THIS SERMON,

*Preached by their Pastor on the commencement of his Thirteenth
Year's Ministry among them,*

Is Dedicated

With feelings of cordial esteem and affection.

THE HISTORY OF THE
CITY OF BOSTON
FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT
TO THE PRESENT TIME
IN TWO VOLUMES
BY NATHANIEL BENTLEY
VOL. I.
BOSTON: PUBLISHED BY
J. B. ALLEN, 1825.

PHILIPPIANS iv.—17.

"I desire fruit, that may abound to your account."

THE twelfth year of my ministry among you came to a close last Sabbath. Entering to-day on the thirteenth, it is not only allowable to turn our thoughts to some subject having a direct bearing on the work of the ministry; it seems almost required by the occasion that we should do so. The words which have been read, it will be seen, furnish us with such a subject. They place distinctly before us what should be the common aim of minister and people, "fruit," whatever that may be found to mean; while they suggest, not obscurely, the interest which both alike have in its attainment. "*I desire*," says the Apostle, "*fruit that may abound to your account.*"

There is in these words, as it appears to me, just that combination of the general and the personal element, which seems required in a text that is to supply the theme of discourse on such an occasion. In ordinary circumstances, it is certainly not desirable that the personal feelings and experiences of the preacher should be obtruded on his hearers; however, they may and, indeed, must affect his statements of divine truth. For it is not to be forgotten that he

must present the truth to others, as he himself sees it and feels it ; in colors, therefore, to some extent borrowed from the character of his own mind and the complexion of his own experience. He must present it thus, otherwise he can preserve neither the integrity of his own nature nor the power of his ministry ; his teaching will cease to be either wholesome or interesting. But, however, the light in which the subject is presented may, in fact, must be in part supplied by the mind and life of the preacher ; the subject itself, the matter of his discourse, should be furnished by the Word of God,—should, unless in the most exceptional circumstances, be some fact or truth of Scripture, and presented as nearly as possible in the form and relations in which Scripture presents it. This has been, I trust, the general character of the preaching on which you have waited in this place, and to-day even it will not partake largely, if at all, of another character. At the same time, the text furnishes the preacher the warrant and the opportunity for expressing his personal interest in the result of the public ministry of the Word ; while it instructs preacher and hearer alike as to what that result is—fruit ; “fruit,” says the Apostle, “that may abound to your account.”

The words occur towards the close of the Apostle's letter to the Philippian church. From the members of this church, “the first fruits” of Europe, as they may be termed, he had received no little kindness. Some churches, formed like it through his instrumentality, had been quite willing to receive of his “spiritual things,” without communicating to him in return of their “carnal things.” It was reward enough for the

Apostle, in their estimation, that he had been honored to lead them to the knowledge of the Saviour, "to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God." They would save him, so far as they were concerned, from the dangers of ease and outward abundance, and from the imputation of worldly motive, leaving him to toil for his own necessities and the necessities of those that were with him, even while he was ministering to them "the glorious gospel of Christ." The Philippian believers were actuated by another and worthier spirit. They treated the Apostle with marked kindness from the first, opening to him in the person of one of their number the comforts of a home, so soon as the Lord had opened her heart to the message of life which he bore : and when he left them to carry the same message to other communities in equal destitution, they did not consider their obligations to him exhausted. They followed him into Thessalonica and Achaia, and to Rome itself, with those benefactions which it is so pleasant for the grateful heart to bestow on one who has put it in possession of large and unexpected good. It belonged to the nature with which Paul was endowed to be in a high degree appreciative of personal kindness ; and grace, the grace which had come to him in Jesus Christ, did not impair this quality, it rather intensified it. If the faith which he had learned to exercise towards Jesus Christ rendered him in a great measure indifferent to hardships and suffering endured on His behalf, enabling him to say in the prospect of bonds and death, "None of these things move me ;" it made him only more appreciative of acts of kindness performed in His name and done

to him as His servant. Accordingly, he enters with great minuteness of detail into the successive gifts of this Church, and writes of them almost with an exuberance of emotion. "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again." "Ye have well done that ye did communicate with my affliction." And then having given expression in these strong terms to the feelings which their repeated benefactions had awakened within him, and as if fearing that his language might be misunderstood, he hastens in the words which are to supply us with our theme of discourse to-day, to give prominence to that element in their gifts, which more than any other lent to them importance and value in his eye. They were "fruit," the product of the new life which had become theirs in Jesus Christ testifying to its presence and gracious power; something not only enriching their present experience, but destined to enhance the happiness and the glory of their future and eternal state. "Not because I desire a gift," or *the* gift, as it should be read; neither its intrinsic value, nor its higher value as an expression of their kindly regard for himself, was the chief source of the gratification which it afforded; and still less did either supply any part of his aim in ministering to them the word of life; "but I desire the fruit," such as this in the present case is, "that may abound to your account."

The truth furnished to us in these words, and to which I wish to call your attention to-day, is, the supreme importance in connection with the enjoyment of gospel privileges of what is here designated fruit as at once satisfying the desire and aim of the right-

mindful pastor, and securing the highest welfare of the Christian people.

In considering this truth the first question that meets us is, What are we to understand by the fruit here spoken of? What is fruit in the Scriptural sense of the term? In the husbandry of earth, it is that which the tilling and the sowing, the planting and the pruning are designed to produce; it is the chief end which the husbandman has in view in all the processes of his art, that which compensates him for his outlay and his toil. What is it in that spiritual husbandry, in which men are said to be laborers "together with God;" that of which the world is the field, the heart of man the soil, and the seed the word of God? I answer, it is before all else, goodness; it is holy and gracious character; it is obedience to the will of God, or, as underlying that obedience, the tastes and habits of a soul that has been created anew in Christ Jesus. Fruit, the fruit at the production of which the Christian ministry should aim, is not necessarily, as we are very ready to conceive, something outward. It does not consist either exclusively or mainly in acts of service rendered, or gifts of money made to Christ's cause. The mistake is one into which we are very ready to fall, especially in an age of bustling activity like the present, that of identifying fruit, the fruit for the sake of which any of us have been "planted in the house of the Lord," with something external, with good works, or, good words, with some form of Christian activity designed and fitted to counteract evil, to relieve human suffering, or in some way to purify and sweeten human life. Fruit, according to the too prevalent idea,

is simply that outcome of a regenerate nature, whether in word or act, by means of which men are made better or happier. But surely it is to be found quite as much in the inward disposition and character which faith in Christ and fellowship with Him slowly form. Surely personal goodness, integrity, unselfishness, purity of thought and feeling, or, to take a higher and more comprehensive term still, but one like these others essentially inward, holiness,—surely holiness is not less, is even more, fruit than any form of outward well-doing. The Christian people of a former age may have erred in regard to the means by which holy and Christ-like character could be best formed, by which saintship could be most surely attained ; finding these means in the seclusion of the cloister, or in the protracted devotions of the closet, rather than in the faithful discharge of the ordinary duties of life : they did not err, in the preeminent importance which they attached to the attainment itself, in regarding it as above all else fruit, the fruit which those united to the Saviour and abiding in Him should be anxious to produce. There are those among us who might still learn from them the true place of holiness. The question is asked, Is such a church fruitful ? In answering it, men, even good men, enquire how many of its members are engaged in Christian work, what does it raise for religious and benevolent purposes, how many Sabbath and week-day services does it carry on ? These are important enquiries, and not irrelevant to the point to be determined, but there is another, far more vital and decisive : In how many of its membership is the character being formed which makes meet for heaven, and

shall find its fitting home there ? This, we may believe, is the question which before all others He asks, who "loved the Church and gave Himself for it ; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing ; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

This question, it is true, is a far more difficult one to answer than those which have reference to the outward life of the Christian, and to the activities by which it is characterized. The answer to it has to be sought in a region where the eye of man sees dimly at best, and where human calculation is apt to err. But this is only what the uniform teaching of Scripture would lead us to expect. That which is highest and best in God's saints, as in His Son Jesus Christ, is ever for the most part of a hidden nature ; it is certainly not obtrusive. "The world," says the Apostle John, "knoweth us not, because it knew Him not." It could count after a way the number, and estimate the magnitude of His miracles. It could trace the course of beneficent activity, which, beginning with His entrance on His public ministry, ceased only with His death on the cross. But that entire surrender of will to the will of the Father who sent Him, that intense and consuming devotion to the ends of His glory as of man's salvation,—this, which was the crowning excellence of the Saviour, it could neither understand nor discern. The world, as much when it wondered after him, and would have made Him a king, as when it crucified Him as a blasphemer, "knew Him not ;" and as it was with the

Master, so it still is with the disciple. The world can observe and estimate after a way his outward activity, can put a value on his gifts, can count his efforts or his sacrifices for truth and righteousness, but the gracious inner life, the homage which is offered to God in the sanctuary of the heart, in the thoughts and feelings which are cherished therein, this it can neither appreciate nor see. And yet who that is at all taught of God can refuse to acknowledge that this is by far the most precious attainment, that this more than anything else deserves to be regarded as "fruit," "the fruit which" will "abound" to the account of those in whom it is found? "The kingdom of God," says the Saviour, "cometh not with observation. Neither shall they say, Lo here! or Lo there! for behold the kingdom of God is *within* you." And to the same effect are the words of the Apostle "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." "But now, being made free from sin and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto *holiness* and the end everlasting life."

Is this all, then? Is the fruit at the production of which the Christian minister is to aim simply that gracious character which carries with it the promise of and the preparation for heaven? By no means. The fruit is in the first place inward and spiritual; but it is not exclusively so. It embraces acts of obedience to the will of God, as well as the holy dispositions from which these flow, and the heavenly character which they help to form. It consists in upright living, as

well as in devout feeling ; in the exercise of justice and of charity towards man, as well as in the sentiment of love and reverence towards God. The service of Christ in life, testimony borne to Him and on His behalf, whether by word or act, in the midst of the indifferent or the scoffing ; efforts put forth to bring unbelieving men to the acknowledgment of His authority, contributions of money to His cause, to His servants, to the poor and needy among His followers, when it is the heart which bestows them, and they express its gratitude for benefit received, or its sympathy with suffering witnessed, and, not least, that diligent and upright discharge of the duties of our several stations in life, which nothing can supersede, and for the absence of which no form of religious effort, and no measure of benevolent giving can compensate ; all this, likewise, must be accounted fruit, belongs to the harvest with which the seed of the word, and the agency of the Holy Spirit accompanying it, are intended to enrich the individual believer and the whole church of Christ.

Now, simply to define in this manner the fruit spoken of in the text, to say that it means all this ; personal goodness first, the goodness of a heart receptive of the grace and renewed by the Spirit of God ; and, as its result, the service of Christ in the life with our thought and affection, and means, is in effect to say that it is all-important ; that it is, what every right-minded minister must desire in the people of his charge, and what, if attained by them, must enhance their present and eternal well-being.

First, it is what every right-minded minister must

desire. "*I desire*," says the Apostle, "the fruit which may abound to your account."

The words express a strong but surely a very natural and justifiable solicitude. In every branch of secular labor, men expect to accomplish something by their toil. He who in early spring ploughs and sows, expects to reap in autumn, and generally does reap. Such a thing as continuing to sow and to plant year after year without reaping, going laboriously through the processes which should lead up to the harvest, and never reaching it, is not dreamt of. Why should it be otherwise in the field of ministerial labor, or of spiritual effort in any form? The true servant of Christ works for, and will hardly be satisfied without results, and the results at which he aims are not simply well-filled pews, reverent attention to the word of God, liberal contributions to His cause; but regenerate souls, humble, pure, God-fearing, unselfish lives, the goodness on which God will at last set the seal of His approval; in one word, "fruit."

I hope it is not necessary to say to you, among whom I have been honoured to labor these twelve years, that this has been my constant aim in ministering to you the word of life. The matter and the manner of my ministrations ought to have made it evident that I have sought "not yours but you," "not a gift, but the fruit that may abound to your account." If the aim has not been maintained with perfect steadiness and purity; if the desire has been now more and now less intense, never, perhaps, reaching in fervor what the interests at stake would justify or demand;

all that is a matter much more for confession to God, than for acknowledgment before you. If reference is made to it at all, it is simply to disclaim any superiority to the weaknesses of fallen human nature, and to make our share of them, even while called to exercise the responsible functions of the Christian ministry, a ground for asking a continued interest in your prayers. "Brethren, pray for us, that the word of God," may not be made of none effect, "may have free course and be glorified."

Second, what the Apostle here designates as "fruit" is fitted to promote, as nothing else can, the interests of the Christian people. There is much that is pleasant and elevating in the exercise of Christian worship. There is much that to a Christian mind is both grateful and helpful, in the intercourse which men are permitted to have with those who come up to the house of God together with them, or who take part with them in Christian work. It is a very high and pure satisfaction to feel the warm glow of Christian emotion as we sing together these psalms and sacred hymns; as it is to experience the quickening and purifying influence of the truth of God when spoken by some one who has felt its power. But all this is not fruit; it is simply the spiritual atmosphere amid which fruit should be matured: should be, and yet not always is; for the soul may remain barren amid the privileges of the gospel, not only possessed, but after a manner appreciated. The really important thing is, the character which the experience described above has helped to form, the graces of which it has put the soul in possession, the goodness which it has

enabled it to acquire. This alone is lasting. This alone is blessed, or the road to what is blessed. In the long run, destiny will be conformed to character; heavenly destiny to holy character. Glory will come to crown the grace that is found within. The vision of God will dawn on the pure in heart. The cup of cold water given to a disciple, the humblest act of service done in Christ's name, will receive its reward. The fruit, if there at all, will be fruit that will "abound to the account" of those in whose lives it has been found.

To what extent the ministry which has been carried on among you during these twelve years has been productive of such results, it is not for me to say. It is fully and certainly known only to Him who "walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks," and who begins his message of warning, of encouragement, or of rebuke to each one of the churches, with the solemn words "I know thy works." But to His glory, of whom "are all things," let it be said that there have been some results for which it becomes us to be thankful. Two hundred and sixty-three persons have been led within the period to make public profession of their faith on Christ, and while it would be too much to claim that all of these were truly converted persons, a good proportion of them have shewn and are shewing, the reality of the change experienced, and of the life received. Many among you have been enabled to lead Christian lives; not a few have died Christian deaths, and let us hope, have entered on the reward of which it is ours simply to speak. A large number of children and young people have received

instruction in the Sabbath Schools and Bible Classes of the congregation. It may be mentioned that in the Bible class taught in the Church on the Sabbath afternoon, over a hundred young men have within the period specified been in attendance, some of them for periods of four, five and six years, who are either now in the Christian ministry, or in course of preparation for it. Much earnest and unwearying service has been rendered by a constantly increasing band of Christian workers; service which, with all the imperfection belonging to it in the minds of those who have rendered it, He, for whose sake it has been offered, will not disown.

As the result of all, the congregation which was weak and burdened at the commencement of the period, but even then possessed of qualities more important than either numbers or wealth, is now comparatively strong and prosperous; taking an honorable place among the congregations of the body in sustaining its more important schemes. Much that is to be regarded with satisfaction in the subsequent history of the congregation must be ascribed to the character and labors of the godly and accomplished minister, by whom it was formed, and who still lives to take a generous interest in its prosperity; and to the active and zealous labors of another servant of God, now no more, by whose seasonable kindness it was tided over a period of extreme difficulty and peril. As regards both of these ministers of Christ, I trust those of you who enjoyed their ministry, find it at once dutiful and pleasant to obey the injunction "Remember them which" had "the rule over you," who "have

spoken unto you the Word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and to-day and for ever."

Our future, the future of the congregation and of the pastor, is in the hand of God. There is every reason for trust in Him, whatever ground there may be for solicitude as regards ourselves. Our very increase in numbers and wealth brings with it dangers to which we were less exposed, when we were comparatively weak. And if the commencement of a ministry in any sphere must be ever attended with some anxiety, its continuance in it through a stretch of years, is seldom altogether free from a similar feeling. In the present instance it may well be, that modes of thought and tones of voice, which were new to you twelve years ago, grown familiar now, have lost something of the interest which novelty lent them. This is one of the disadvantages inseparable from a stated pastorate, far more than compensated by advantages not attainable without it. On the whole, however, if we are faithful to the position God has given us, there is no reason why the future should be regarded with apprehension, why we should anticipate diminished usefulness or diminished prosperity. There are, doubtless, aspects of truth to be more clearly discerned, or more strongly emphasized, as there are lives susceptible of fuller and heartier consecration to God under its influence. And if much truth, which has been spoken, must be in substance, at least, repeated—for there is no new gospel for man's fallen condition, any more than there is a new sun for the successive spring-times of earth—may we not hope that there are rising up among us

youthful hearts in which that old imperishable seed of the word will find a still more congenial soil, and yield a richer and more abundant harvest? Be this our aim, "fruit;" fruit, and not leaf or blossom only; action, and not profession simply; life- and not mere lip-service; worship, indeed, but worship which shall supply motive to work, and lend sanctity to the humblest details of daily life. "I desire,"—do we not all?—"the fruit that may abound to your account."

It will be borne in mind that fruit implies life, and that this life comes only from Jesus Christ. Do not measure the importance of this truth by the space its statement occupies in this discourse. Measure its importance by the earnestness with which the Saviour enforces it when He says, "Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me." You desire fruit; then if ye are indeed Christ's, abide in Him; and if the light of the Sabbath has found you in the enjoyment of Christian ordinances, but still out of Christ, without the union to Him which the faith of the heart establishes, believe even now on His name, open your heart to the life which He desires to infuse, as you would not find your fearful doom foreshadowed in the branch which is cast forth and is burned.

In conclusion, this new period of my ministry among you opens in the midst of unusually severe and wide-spread suffering. At no former period in its history, has the congregation known anything like the same amount of sickness and death among its members

as during the last few months. With noiseless foot the dreaded messenger has come to very many of your homes ; and all classes and all ages have been obliged to hear his summons. Last Sabbath, it was the sudden removal of a healthful and engaging boy which we had to mourn. This Sabbath, it is the death, after a lingering illness, of one of the earliest members of the congregation, and the severance thereby for him who is left, of a companionship of forty years, which we have to announce. Truly the lessons of the pulpit, proclaiming the frailty and uncertainty of human life, and summoning men to repentance and faith, are echoed back as they have never been before from vacant places on every side in our sanctuary. It were sad, indeed, if, amid these ravages of death, of which there are so many visible indications in our midst, there were no promise of reparation and reunion. But there is. Amid the spectacle of opening graves, and sorrowful hearts, the eye of faith can discern the form, or its ear hear the voice, of Him who is the resurrection and the life, who will by and by repair all the desolation which death has wrought, and who meanwhile blends with its inevitable sorrows the holiest consolation. To Him, let us all in spirit go : with Him, let us all abide. He ever lives. He abides the same amid all change and decay here below ; and with him abides all true goodness, all unselfish acts, every humblest deed of serving love, every thought, or even purpose of charity. Nothing spiritual perishes. Holy and gracious character shall remain, and remaining, ensure the blessedness of him who has attained it,

when the scene of things amid which it was formed has passed away, and the experiences of health and of sickness, of sorrow and of joy, by which it was shaped, exist only as a distant memory. "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear."